

Complaints Procedure

Introduction

The key role of the staff in the Diocesan Office (RDBF and RDBE) is to support the bishops, clergy, parishes and schools in their mission and ministry. In the provision of all our services and advice we aim to be efficient, accurate and timely and to treat everyone professionally, with dignity and respect.

We recognise that sometimes things do go wrong, and we welcome constructive feedback to improve our working practices. This policy is designed to provide a mechanism which is clear, concise and easy to understand for anyone external wishing to make a complaint.

Aim of this Policy

- To take all complaints seriously and take appropriate steps to respond to them fairly, recognising any lessons which can be learned.
- To provide a structured process for complaints to be received and handled consistently, efficiently and fairly.
- To deal with complaints as swiftly as possible within the timeframe outlined within this procedure.
- Where appropriate, to use informal stages to seek a resolution depending on the severity of the complaint, unless the matter has been raised before and informal stages have been used already.
- We recognise that making a complaint and being the subject of a complaint can be upsetting and stressful and we are committed to dealing with complaints with sensitivity and by treating all parties with dignity and respect.

Scope of Policy

This policy should be used when making a complaint about a member of staff who is an employee of the RDBF/E or department or working practice within the diocesan office team.

Linked Policies

There may be occasions when there is another more appropriate procedure in place, depending on the parties involved and/or nature of the complaint.

- For complaints relating to Bullying and Harassment, please refer to the Anti Bullying and Harassment policy [2024-anti-bullying-and-harrassment-policy.pdf](#)
- For complaints against a member of Clergy, please see the Clergy Complaints procedure: [makingcomplainta4.pdf \(churchofengland.org\)](#) or CDM process: [Clergy Discipline | The Church of England](#)

- For complaints being made **by** an employee of the RDBF/E, these should be addressed using the employee Grievance Procedure contained within the Staff Handbook.
- If your complaint relates to a Safeguarding matter, specifically the conduct of the Safeguarding Team, this policy may be used, however the DSAP Chair and/or Bishop's Lead Archdeacon for Safeguarding will also be consulted to determine appropriate steps.

There are further examples of occasions when this policy cannot be used contained within Appendix 1.

Informal complaint resolution – Stage 1

We encourage you to initially raise your concerns with the relevant Team Leader. You may find that raising your complaint under the informal stage is a sufficient and effective way to resolve your concerns, particularly as the timescales are normally shorter and the method provides the opportunity for direct open discussion with the Team Leader concerned.

If your complaint is relating to the Team Leader, you can instead raise this informally with the Diocesan Secretary or Head of People.

Complaints raised at this informal stage will usually be dealt with through face to face, telephone or online conversations.

If at any stage of this process, you wish to have an informal conversation about where to direct your complaint, please contact the Head of People.

Making a Complaint

Complaints should be made within 28 days of the incident that you are complaining about occurring, or the most recent incident if relating to a series or pattern of events. Complaints received outside of this time frame may not be considered, however, if there are extenuating circumstances which have meant it has not been possible for you to raise your complaint within this timeframe, you should state why, and we will consider this fairly in order to determine the most appropriate way forward.

Formal complaint – Stage 2

If it has not be possible to resolve your complaint at Stage 1 of the process, or due to the severity of the complaint, it may be necessary to raise your complaint formally at Stage 2 of this process. Your complaint should be made in writing detailing the reasons for your complaint. Your written complaint should be raised within the same timescales set

out above and should be sent to the Diocesan Secretary, or the Director of Education if the matter relates to the DBE.

If your complaint is relating to the Diocesan Secretary, your complaint should be sent to the Chair of the Board of Finance. If your complaint is relating to the Director of Education, your complaint should be sent to the Chair of the Board of Education.

The Process

On receipt of your complaint, we will acknowledge receipt within 5 working days. We will consider and appoint a suitable person to investigate your complaint. Where possible, the complaint will be reviewed and investigated by the appropriate Team Leader or Head of Department to which your complaints relates. Where this is not possible or this presents a conflict, an alternative Team Leader or Head of Department may be appointed. There are also occasions where it may be necessary to appoint an independent person to investigate.

Investigation

The investigation will vary depending on the matter being raised, but will usually include;

1. Meeting with the complainant to discuss the complaint in more detail and answer any further questions about the complaint.
2. Informing the member of staff or team who are the subject of the complaint as soon as possible and sharing details of the complaint and meeting with them to allow full and fair opportunity to respond to the complaint.
3. Meeting with any other witnesses or employees relevant to the complaint.
4. Allowing all participants in investigation meetings the right to be accompanied to those meetings, subject to potential conflicts of interest. (For employees, representatives should be either a colleague or trade union representative)
5. Assessing the information gathered and adopting an objective and balanced approach to the information.
6. Avoiding allowing personal views about the complainant or the alleged perpetrator to influence the overall assessment of the matter under review.
7. Keeping confidential records of the investigation and ensure that these are handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

Outcome

The person investigating the complaint will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented and can either;

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

The complainant will receive a response to their complaint within one month of their initial complaint, if the complaint has been upheld in whole or in part, this letter, where appropriate, may include one or more of the following;

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review policies in light of the complaint
- an apology

Should the recommendations include that the matter be considered under the RDBF/E employee Disciplinary Procedure, this will be passed to the relevant Line Manager or Diocesan Secretary with guidance from the Head of People.

It should be noted that the complainant will not be informed of this including any subsequent disciplinary process or action taken.

Formal Review – Stage 3

If the complainant is dis-satisfied with the outcome or proposals for resolution they may write to the Diocesan Secretary within the stated deadline (usually 5 working days), to ask for a review of the investigation. They will consider a review on the following grounds:

- Further evidence is available to support the complaint
- The conclusions of the investigation are not supported by the evidence gathered
- There is evidence of bias or prejudice on behalf of the investigator

The Diocesan Secretary (or Director of Education where appropriate) will then determine how to review the complaint options include - but are not limited to:

- Commissioning a new investigation
- Asking the Investigator to review their findings
- Asking the Investigator to consider additional relevant information
- Reviewing the evidence gathered by the Investigator

The Diocesan Secretary (or Director of Education where appropriate) will then inform the complainant of the outcome of their review and any proposals for resolution.

This is the end of the formal complaints process.

Whistleblowing and The Charity Commission

Whistleblowing is the reporting of suspected wrongdoing or dangers in relation to our activities. This includes bribery, fraud or other criminal activity, miscarriages of justice,

health and safety risks, damage to the environment and any breach of legal or professional obligations.

The complainant can complain to the Charity Commission at any stage. The commission's involvement in looking at complaints is limited to issues that pose a serious risk of significant harm to a charity's beneficiaries, assets, services or reputation. Information about the kind of complaints the Commission can involve itself in can be found on their website at: www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc47.aspx

Vexatious and Malicious complaints

All complaints will be considered fairly, however, if we believe the complaint has been made with malicious intentions which have improper effects, such as harassment of staff, or repeated submissions of a complaint to which a final response has been provided as described in this procedure, we reserve the right to cease correspondence with the complainant.

Before refusing to correspond further in respect of a complaint considered to be vexatious we will give due warning to the complainant. If it is proven that a complaint has been made against an employee of the Board(s) maliciously or in bad faith, we may take any action we consider to be appropriate. Support /counselling will also be offered to the employee.

Appendix 1 - Complaints not covered by this policy

This policy does not cover complaints relating to the following: -

1. Matters that have already been investigated through this policy or an equivalent complaints procedure including persistent and vexatious complaints. These can be complaints which can be seen unreasonable. They may not have any serious purpose or value and are designed to cause disruption or annoyance and/or have the effect of harassing the RDBF/E.
2. Anonymous complaints will not be dealt with, unless there is significant evidence of a valid case and good reason to protect the identity of the complainant.
3. Matters relating to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults which do not relate specifically to the Safeguarding team, as these may be determined according to national policies.
4. Complaints relating to diocesan church schools, where the individual school's complaints process should be used.
5. Complaints relating to local parochial matters, where the matter should be referred to the relevant Parochial Church Council (PCC).
6. Complaints relating to clergy housing
7. Complaints from Ecclesiastical office holders where the matter is a grievance relating to the exercise of the Office held.
8. Complaints relating to Bullying and Harassment where the Anti-bullying and Harassment policy should be applied.
9. Issues relating to the capability of Ecclesiastical office holders should be addressed under the Capability Procedure.
10. Members of Diocesan Staff, volunteers and consultants should address any concerns using the RDBF/E's internal staff policies and processes.
11. In addition, this policy is not to be used as a substitute for the Clergy Discipline Measure, which is a separate process.